HISTORY AND CURRENT CHALLENGES IN USAID'S APPROACH TO ADDRESSING GENDER ISSUES IN DEVELOPMENT

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Recognizing the critical nature of women's economic and social contributions to development, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has for many years formulated policies and institutional structures to target women in development. These have derived from what has been known as the "Percy Amendment" of the Foreign Assistance Act of l96l. This l973 amendment required U.S. bilateral assistance to contribute to the integration of women into the national economies of developing countries. In l977 the Percy Amendment was restated to recognize women's roles in economic production, family support, and the overall development process.

To implement this mandate, USAID created the Office of Women in Development in l974. The Office reported directly to the USAID Administrator—providing a clear indication of the priority of the issue, but limited capability to directly impact on field programs. Within a few years, the Office was moved to the Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination and was provided with its own budget. This dramatically increased the effectiveness of the Office in promoting attention to women in development issues in matters of policy, as well as through technical support to field missions.

In l982, while the Office was situated in the Policy Bureau, USAID became one of the first donors to articulate a WID policy, framing the issue as primarily economic and asserting that inadequate understanding of women's roles within and beyond the household leads to inappropriate project design and implementation. The policy mandates that all

relevant data be disaggregated by sex, that country strategies involve women, and that USAID consultants address women in development issues in their work for the Agency. This was a powerful policy development, putting USAID in a lead position.

Of course policy statements do not, in and of themselves, lead to desired outcomes. By l988 the Agency had recognized the need to mandate certain actions to ensure implementation of the policy. The USAID Administrator issued specific WID Action Items to ensure that attention to WID issues would be "institutionalized" within the Agency. These included instructions that:

- **Bureaus and USAID Missions were to reflect sex-disaggregated data in USAID's program documents and all new data collection activities were to be sex-disaggregated for USAID's project and non-project assistance and reporting documents.**

- **That all Bureaus and USAID missions were to ensure that country strategy documents, program documents, and all project and non-project assistance documents were to explicitly describe strategies to involve women; the benefits and impediments to women's participation in development; and benchmarks to measure women's participation in and benefits from development activities.**

- **That specific women in developing training should be considered a priority for USAID personnel, particularly in the areas of agriculture; private enterprise development, including micro- and small-scale enterprise; and natural resource management and environment.**

- **And that country strategies, projects and programs should be designed so that the percentage of women participants would be demonstrably increased; and that the percentage of women who receive benefits would be in approximate proportion to their traditional participation in the activity or their proportion of the population—whichever is greater.**

This was an important step but, inevitably, in an organization with many missions operating across the world, implementation was uneven. Certainly no formula was in place to ensure the application of gender analysis in all USAID projects.

Nonetheless, by the late l980s, USAID had in fact achieved some success in gender integration. USAID's microenterprise development programs stand out as one example. Since the late l970s the Agency has supported a substantial number of small-scale credit and business development schemes. These have incorporated the innovative alternatives to systems used by commercial banks with which we're now so familiar: minimal application requirements, peer group guarantees, very small loan amounts, and unusual repayment schedules. Women often represent 80% or more of clients in these programs.

Education is another good example. In the mid-1980s, USAID's Blueprint for Development called for gender parity in basic education and the Agency has since then supported (1) efforts to reduce the costs of girls' schooling—by providing scholarships, textbooks, or uniforms; and (2) efforts to reduce parental concerns about girls' schooling—by providing small schools within the communities they serve, recruiting local female teachers, and, sometimes, providing separate facilities for girls.

In family planning, USAID shifted away from its somewhat demographic approach of the 1960s and 1970s, to a quality of care approach in the l980s. These programs focused on providing women with a broad choice of family planning methods, improving the competence of service providers and their relationships with clients, and improving follow-up to ensure that women were using contraceptives safely and effectively.

What made these areas more amenable than others to the incorporation of gender analysis? Three main factors were at play to various degrees in each of these program sectors. In microenterprise, there was no particularly compelling rationale, at least in the l970s and early l980s, for a focus on improving the lot of women entrepreneurs. There was not then, and may not yet be, a strong research basis for believing women's income to be more beneficial for families than is men's income.

On the other hand, it happens that women entrepreneurs have a lot in common with the smallest entrepreneurs, about which we knew quite a bit. We knew how to address certain constraints that turned out to be the constraints faced by women. And, when women were included in microenterprise projects (initially, inadvertently), we saw very strong performance: high repayment rates, good project success. So there was the "know-how" to address gender in microenterprise development, and project success was heightened—and these were both key factors.

In education, there has for some time been solid evidence of a compelling rationale for improving girls' schooling, e.g., effects on fertility, child survival, and health. Knowledge of how to improve girls' education was initially limited, but certainly project success improved when girls as well as boys attended school. Girls' low base of enrollment and completion often meant rather striking percentage improvements in those indicators. So both a compelling rationale for addressing gender issues and improved project success were at work.

In family planning, we had again a compelling rationale to look at gender, given doomsday population scenarios and the central role of women in child bearing and child survival. Again, not much knowledge of how to implement a more woman-focused set of programs in the beginning, but certainly project success was affected. As with education, we began with low base numbers of women clients and could fairly readily achieve rather important improvements. Once again, both a compelling rationale and improved project success were at work.

It would seem, then, that the common factors in determining whether gender is addressed have a strong impact on project success: a compelling rationale—not limited to the sector in question; and whether or not it is known "how to" address gender.

Where these factors were absent, less was done. An example is agricultural development, where in the 1970s development assistance programs often overlooked and

sometimes even damaged women. The compelling rationale for a gender focus that we now know exists went unrecognized for a long time because of an emphasis on high-tech export cropping. It also went unrecognized because the relationship between gender and project success was often negative. In fact, an "invisible" side effect was often longer hours of unpaid work for women.

So these three factors—impact on project success, knowledge of how to address gender issues, and a compelling rationale—are important in whether or not gender will be addressed in any given activity. And that means that we must pursue incentives, technical expertise, and awareness combined with commitment.

Within an institution like USAID, this means addressing personnel systems to improve staff expertise and accountability, changing procurement systems to hold our partners and contractors to the same standard, and fundamentally reflecting our commitment in the guiding strategic framework of the Agency. Programmatically, it means support for NGO and contractor capacity to implement gender integrated programs; solid research and information dissemination; strong technical services; and a means to develop professional expertise in gender issues. At USAID, with the adoption of the Gender Plan of Action in 1996, we hoped to address these institutional issues.

The Gender Plan encompasses more than fifteen specific actions. Among the most critical are:

- **The introduction of gender expertise as a consideration in the award of USAID contracts and grants;**
- **The introduction of performance on gender integration as a factor in staff performance ratings;**
- **The implementation of a women in development fellows program to help build a technical cadre knowledgeable in these issues;**
- **The incorporation of gender considerations into the Agency's technical training programs for field officers; and**

- **A commitment, in our new results-driven systems, to assessing and reporting USAID program impact on women.**

We are already beginning to see the impact of these policies and actions. Gender has become a key cross-cutting issue that must be addressed in what is referred to as the R4 process—that is Results Review and Resource Request process, the system by which the Agency is connecting achievement of concrete results in the field to the allocation of resources. In other words, the extent to which field Missions are addressing gender issues in their programming can now be a factor in how much funding they receive for future programming.

USAID's strategic framework, which guides all field programming, has been revised to better reflect the importance of gender considerations.

Very importantly, the Automated Directives System or ADS, which guides all the work of the Agency from strategic planning to procurement and implementation, is being overhauled and instructions to address gender issues at each juncture are being incorporated.

All of this implies a legitimacy for women in development or gender issues that is quite important for those who have worked so long to promote attention to gender. With impact, however, comes a renewed demand for technical support of the highest quality. Project officers, contract officers, contractors and grantees are now accepting their responsibilities for addressing gender. But, because they are *not* specialists, they are turning to the Office of Women in Development and our contractors and partners for advice on how to do so. This demand for expertise will be felt increasingly in the WID community as we are asked to show how women's issues can be addressed in macroeconomic policy reform, in trade capacity building programs, in post-conflict settings, and in the increasingly required humanitarian relief programs of USAID and other donor agencies. These are areas in which gender issues have been less well-elaborated, but they are critical—and so our successes create our next set of challenges.

It is my hope that we will rise to these challenges in two important ways: First, with increasing rigor and policy relevance in our analyses of the range of issues in which gender considerations are key; and, secondly, with a renewed commitment to demand continued attention to gender issues, and to confront and prevent any efforts to undermine in future administrations what we have so determinedly achieved in this one. The Office of Women in Development looks forward to working with USAID staff and partners in that cause.